

NORTH CHICAGO, IL – Joining hundreds of veterans, sailors and hospital staff, U.S. Representative Mark Kirk, Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon Mansfield, Navy Surgeon General Vice Admiral Adam Robinson and Emmy award-winning actor Gary Sinise announced the first-ever Navy-VA federal health care center will be named for 10th District resident and national hero, Capt. James A Lovell, Jr. A former navy pilot, Capt. Lovell is best known for his service as the commander of Apollo XIII, returning his crew safely to Earth after an explosion on the way to the moon in 1970. For that mission, Capt. Lovell received the Medal of Freedom.

"In 1999, our VA hospital was scheduled to close," Congressman Kirk said. "After working with the Navy, VA and local veterans, we saved our hospital by combining it with Naval Hospital Great Lakes, igniting a \$130-million expansion project. This first-in-the-nation Navy-VA hospital will be named after one of the most famous navy veterans. By lending his name to this new hospital, Jim Lovell adds a stature that will help our hospital's budget and future. The James A. Lovell, Jr. Federal Health Care Center will care for over 100,000 veterans, military retirees, sailors and their families."

"By placing Jim Lovell's name on this place of healing, it is my hope we will instill his courage, leadership and innovation to all who walk through these doors," said Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield. "It is a deserved tribute to an American hero and a fitting name as we embark on a new approach in providing 21st century health care for our veterans, our warriors and their families."

"From the seamen recruits who are getting trained, mentored and anchored in the life and service culture of being sailors, to those who have returned from serving at sea or on the battlefield and have served our nation with pride, honor, and distinction, this partnership allows us to maintain the continuum of care for the full military life journey," Navy Surgeon General Vice Admiral Adam Robinson said. "The Navy and VA have a long history of sharing services. Together we will shape the future of federal health care by creating a federal health care center of excellence through world-class patient care, customer service, education and research."

Following the ceremony, Gary Sinise and his Lt. Dan Band played for over 2,000 sailors at Naval Station Great Lakes. Sinise is involved with numerous veterans' issues and groups, working closely with the Disabled American Veterans, The Coalition to Salute Americas Heroes, The Wounded Warrior Project, the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial and The Fisher Houses. Sinise attended Highland Park High School

and played a disabled veteran in the 1994 movie “Forrest Gump,” and an astronaut in the 1995 movie “Apollo 13.”

After a VA consultant recommended the closure of the VA Medical Center in 1999, Congressman Kirk and local veterans set the goal of saving the VA by combining it with a new naval hospital. In 2003, Kirk won approval for the first phase of the integration project, moving the Navy’s mental health unit into the North Chicago VA. Last year Kirk participated in the opening of a \$13 million joint Navy-VA emergency room and surgical facility. This July, the Navy and VA broke ground on a \$16 million parking garage.

Next year, the final phase of the project will begin with the groundbreaking of the project’s centerpiece, a \$100 million ambulatory care center. The facility is expected to open in 2010 with a total cost of approximately \$130 million. The facility will save an estimated \$160 million through the projected 40-year life of the hospital.